Joseph A. Howland's
Letters.

89.4.11 ปีที่ 11

Worcester Oct 8. 1859

Friend May

Your letter of August 31st is now before me. I was somewhat astonished upon its receipt that you should be capable of such a letter, and I am today quite as much astonished at its re-reading. I was astonished at what you said to me in the cars on our return from Ivy bridge a fortnight since, and I have been more and more astonished at every step and new development in this extraordinary procedure. I am staggered and confused, and could I realize that these things are really as they appear to me to be, I should loose all my faith and trust in men. I hoped that it was all an illusion or dream from which I might awake, and discover that those whom I had been so respected and confided in as honest, honorable men were really so, and not the opposite, as they have appeared to me in the light of their recent acts, with your explanations and explanations of them. But alas! the dream, unpleasant as it is, continues, and after three weeks of waiting my "state of mind" remains the same, and I must address you as best I can now, without waiting longer for a change that may not come. and which if it should would seem to me to change the whole experience and judgment of my life.

I used to suppose myself possessed of ordinary common sense and tolerable judgment, however much I might lack discretion, and I still think that I have not lost it, but that I have sufficient to put a few ideas together and draw legitimate conclusions.

and shall thereafter try to use it in these premises as best I can even though it should seem to you or others as nonsense or delusion.

I have been in the employ of the American Anti Slavery Society somewhat more than four years, and being now summarily discharged I naturally inquire "Why?"

The Committee have the power to appoint and discharge at pleasure. But is it right that they should act from mere caprice, passion, or pleasure without sufficient reason, in the discharge of an agent who has served them through a series of years? Or, having a reason, that they should decline to assign it? Despots, and all tyrants might claim a right to such arbitrary exercise of power but right does not necessarily attach to might. And honest candid men do not claim the right to act in matters involving others interests without assigning to them a reason.

The Committee have acted, there is some cause or causes for this action. What is it? — you tell me that I do not know, and have no right to know, and then go on to assign various possible reasons, and finally tell me positively and distinctly that my Standard letter is the cause. All the while claiming, that you do not know, and therefore cannot tell, and that you are not authorized to say what you may suppose to be the motives that have led them to this vote!

What a precious muddle you make of it. I know, and you know, that that letter was the cause. Your letters to me, and conversation with me have told me so, and all your attempts at concealment and dust throwing to blind and mislead me are hitherto useless.

That bring the cause of my discharge. I ask is it a sufficient one? and I reply "no!" it affords no reasonable excuse as I look at it, for the act, and I would be glad if you or any one else can show me that it does.

You say in your letter, and in conversation, that my Standard letter indicates a lack of confidence in and a disrespect for the Committee, that renders it impossible for me to serve longer in an agency with propriety or advantage. What a premise for such a conclusion! Have I been sent to the field to respect the Committee? to sustain them or the society? — or to sustain principles? and while I am sound in principle, and diligent in my advocacy of them, what matters it what I think of the Committee, or Society? Is our movement carried on for the support of certain men, or of certain principles? I had supposed that it was "principles and not men" that I was to be true to. "Men may change, but principles never". But your defence of the action of the Committee, and the pressure down with which you allow me to criticise all anti-slavery professors outside our ranks, while you diligently insist upon my being silent towards the Board, and our "proved leaders", indicates to me that you at least support the work to be mainly a man service after all.

The only aspect which could in my mind by possibility be supposed to justify the Committee in their action, is that it might be thought to seem to the readers of the Standard a little strange that the Committee

should employ an agent who made such exposures.
But I have looked in the Standard in vain for some
notice of my exclusion and hence conclude that the
Committee have not acted upon this supposition, or
probably have not thought of it, as a justification
this action, else why not notify the readers of the
Standard and the public, so that this supposition
discredit might no longer attach to the Society?

There is a well understood principle of common law
and of common sense and justice too, that no person
is to be tried or condemned privately, but that he ought
to be confronted personally and openly with his ac-
cusers, and know what, as well as who, was dealing
against him. And this reasonable idea is in-
corporated into the Constitutions and laws of nearly
if not quite all so called free governments. And
I simply thought that the men with whom I was
dealing were of that openness and honor, that they
of all others, had "no concealment", and would
as do for reasons, orthodox churches and jesuitical
inquisitors repudiate this common principle. But
also I seem to have been mistaken for you are "as-
tonished" that I should ask who are dealing against
me, and grudgingly give me part only of the desired
information, denying me the rest! and denying my
right to ask it! and trying to have me suppose that
you do not know yourself, and that I have no right to
know the Why, as you deny me the right to ask the Who.

Well, I know the Why, and also am as well

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satisfied in my own mind of the who. but it is of small consequence who he is, and as you seek for him concealment, I conclude that he and you esteem the deed a dark one, and I shall not take hand to ferret him out.

I supposed my distinction of "acts as an Agent" a proper and legitimate one. Many's the time that you and I and all of us have been called to defend the society from the charges of those enemies who called it an "infidel" organization because some of our agents and prominent men attended Anti Bible and Anti Sabbath Conventions. We have denied that the society was responsible for the theology or private opinions of its representatives, only upon the one question of slavery, and so long as they were faithful in the support of the principles of the society while in the discharge of their functions as agents, and were not faithless to their duty here, we were not responsible for their sayings or doings or beliefs, upon matters of an outside nature or in their individual responsibility. This has always, as now, seemed to me a common sense view of the matter, and there is to me "force in the distinction" of acts as an agent or otherwise. But you say that the Committee do not see it. Well, if they are right, then I think there is force in the charge that has been urged against us, that we are an infidel organization, because some of our men are privately and aside from their anti slavery duties and functions protestants against the popular theology.

I had supposed that our platform and our movement

was free to difference of opinion, and to mutual criticism. Mr. Phillips says in the Standard that our platform was made on purpose to accommodate it. But this seems to have been all for show. For I am cut off, because I have and express in my own private account a difference of opinion from some, or make a criticism on others! Well, It may be that we have no more freedom than the churches or politicians!

I spoke of this action as unprecedented, and you reply that they have terminated agencies before. — of course — but in this way? — I doubt it! You cite Daniel and S. S. Foster, and proceed to show that their agencies terminated because they persisted "while agents", "as agents" in doing that which the committee deemed detrimental to the cause. I see and appreciate now if true, but not at all parallel to my case. For no such charge, or any charge at all respecting the discharge of my agency is brought against me, and you will have to look elsewhere for precedents. If my recollection serves, Daniel Foster resigned his agency, and S. S. Foster accepted his voluntarily, and in neither case was the agency termination by a vote of the Committee issued in them as in my case. So again the precedent is lacking and you will have to look further for illustrative cases.

You say that the Society must to increase rather than diminish its free of misc and faithful agents. Then I am unwise or unfaithful. Here is certainly implied in proclamation. But will you dare to

put your finger upon any plan or act of my agency and declare it unwise or unfaithful? Can you do it?

You say that I have "charged the officers of the Society with the grossest unfairness" – "of most audacious and unjust behavior", and then coolly say "this is no very grave offence". – "and certainly involves you in no dishonor". Now I cannot compass such logic, my "views" are not "broad" enough to make these hang together, or to understand why I am discharged, when I "have committed no very grave offence".

I need the more "Summary", and you rejoin that I have had "three months notice", calling my attention to the letter that you wrote to me in reply to my question as to what the "three months appointment" ~~appointment~~ meant, and say that you notified me that unless the Treasurer was in better funds than was probable, there would be a necessity for the termination of my agency. Now, supposing that you did say that or its equivalent, what has it to do with my offence at all, and what indication could I gather therefrom that I was liable to be expelled for a "loss of confidence in the committee"? I cannot put that and that together and produce such a conclusion. And if you can, you have a better ability at postlogging than I have given you credit for.

But the great difficulty of this statement is that you wrote me no such thing. Your letter of June 10th in reply to my queries is before me, and in it you express surprise and amusement that I should need

to ask the questions, and go on to say that the "three months appointment" was, first, to cover the period of summer work, when it was usual to perform only Sunday labor; and second, that by the expiration of that time, it was expected that the Hovey fund would begin to be available, "and all agents of the society coming within the conditions of that grant, will be likely to be sustained upon it." And then you sum up emphatically by saying "That is the whole of it."

And now, you have the assurance to tell me that the three months appointment was intended to terminate my agency, and I ought so to have understood it without compelling the Committee to pass this final vote!!. But where in the appointment or in your exposition of it, is the indication that I should then be cut out of the field? Is there not a direct assurance that I am to be kept in the work? What indication is there of dissatisfaction? Where the "notice"? I do not see it, and I doubt if you can.

And here let me advise you of the propriety of keeping copies of your letters for reference so that when you have occasion to patch up a case for again, you can refer to your past statements, and try to make them correspond with the present, that is "make your stories hang together".

You say that I have "manifested a determination to press upon particular speeches a construction and meaning which a liberal and just consideration of other speeches and articles, for years past, of the

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same person, plainly shows to be wholly unwarranted and in fact a complete misrepresentation of his belief and position". In reply I say that no means past life and speeches are to be taken to control his present when the present differs from the past. Then I ask, if he is misrepresented why does not he or some one for him show it! no one dares the attempt! but a junto of his friends feeling mortified at the exposure of his dissection, conspire to squelch out the one who calls attention to the change, and by the exercise of arbitrary power, without proper or decent cause assigned and without right, they suspend the lecturing agency of one who has not in meeting or conversation or in any discharge of his function or association as an agent touched the matter! but has written a letter! Why did they not forbid him to write? they could not. Why not request to publish? they dare not. But thinking to do the work otherwise, they exercise a power but not a right, and stop the agency!!! Now I the friend correspondent of the Standard, as R. M. is, and should I write letters like his, insulting to some of the best and truest spirits now in our movement, and assuming a ground that is fatal to the whole theory of the freedom of an organization and platform, and the Committee should notify me that thereupon they wished me to write no more such, or no more letters at all, and discharge me from my writing agency, I could understand it, and think there would be power and propriety in it too. But in our case our ox is gored, in the other, some-

You say that I have "charged" the Committee, etc. and have refused to explain the charge or show the evidence on which I based it. This is an untrue statement, and I utterly deny and repudiate it. As I have made no charge upon the Committee, and do not believe them entirely or actively responsible for the fact stated, (which may ~~it~~ be perfectly defensible, though you condemn it) I cannot and will not take upon the showing or proof of a charge which I have not made. But I hold myself in readiness now, as always, to state privately or publicly the detail of the Ossawkie statement, when called upon properly for an explanation or for proof.

The statement is fully true, (as a statement ~~yours~~ though not as a charge against the Committee) and the Committee if they know any thing of the matter, know it, yourself included. And you have virtually admitted it to me, and tried to explain and defend the fact, to Randall Phillips promptly and fully admits it to me, and justifies it too, and then goes into Committee and cuts off my head for stating it!!

Well, it is said that wonders never cease. But I have had so many astonishments that I fear my stock of astonishment will soon be exhausted, and all my other stock too, and I shall be left in a hopeless muddle.

But looking at it even just as I have been stated it, I am still simple and hopeful enough to suppose and believe that those of whom I am writing, yourself included, do not intend to do any wrong thing in this matter, and are only laboring under a temporary delusion

or blindness. not exactly what orthodoxy calls judicial blindness, but nevertheless quite as involuntary. hence I write pointedly hoping to awaken you to the light.

I shall delay awhile my address to the Committee. But if the present relations continue, and I do not come to the same balance of mind possessed and acted upon by the Committee, I shall by and by communicate to them my views of the whole matter. And then, after a time, if no new thing occurs, I shall, as at present advised, communicate with my friends and the public, who read the Standard and Liberator, upon the matter for this thing must not be done in a corner. I must not be thrust privily out, who have for a time stood publicly in the field proper.

I never asked an agency of the society. I was urged into it by those who had a higher estimate of my ability to serve the cause than I possess. and when at various times I have proposed retiring from the field I have been labored with to remain. It is unpleasant trying work, and I should always have shrunk from it, as I did for years before entering it, were it not that the representations of the true friends of the cause seemed to make it duty for me to labor constantly and publicly in a cause that I loved so well. And if at any time the Committee had said that they lacked the necessary funds, that I lacked the needed eloquence or magnetism, or was not sufficiently successful in financial ability, or had they said it now, I should have received the notice uncomplainingly and almost thankfully, and

my confidence in, and respect for, the committee w
have remained unshaken, if not increased, Bu
when I am unjustly and wrongfully impeached
I must and shall protest. Had I had o
portunity to take an honorable discharge at this t
I should have received it with peculiar pleasure a
satisfaction, as my health is not sufficient for t
labor of a winter campaign, I have been hardly
able to do the common work of Sunday service, for I
not recover as I hoped to from the hardships of
last winter service in Ohio, if indeed I ever shall,
unstrung nerves and rheumatic back will long
mind me of foot and horse back expeditions through
rain and mud with constant lecturing thrown in.
But I can endure the reminders of them pains mo
bravely than the supposition of false principles,

Hoping that the great cause will not suff
by these discussions

I am yours for the Slaves cause
now and ever

Joseph A. Holmes

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